

THE CONSOLE

A Story, By Richard Harding Davis

Introduction by Irvin S. Cobb.

SO long as the reading public of this country care for good, clean stories—stories full of the vigor and joy of life, stories that are free from smut or veiled filth, stories that express the aspirations of the real American—just so long will the writings of Richard Harding Davis be printed and reprinted in the English language. Himself a real American, he wrote of Americans of his own time, for Americans of all future times to read.

FOR over forty years, in one part of the world or another, old man Marshall had been a United States consul. He had been appointed by Lincoln. For a quarter of a century that fact was his distinction. It was now his epitaph. But in former years, when place hunters demanded his consular sign as a reward for a younger and more aggressive party worker, the ghost of the dead President protected him. "You can't touch him," the State Department would say, "why, he was appointed by Lincoln!"

Old Marshall was a consul after his own heart. His official reports were models of English; full of information, intelligent, valuable, well observed.

"If that old man's been feeding from the public trough ever since the civil war," protested a "practical" politician, "it seems to me, Mr. Secretary, that he's about had his share. Some of us that have done the work, that have borne the brunt—"

"This place he now holds," interrupted the Secretary, "is a reward for services like yours. I can't pronounce the name of it, and I'm not sure that I should like to see it. Of the last six consuls we sent there, three resigned within a month, and the fourth died of yellow fever. Still, if you insist—"

The practical politician reconsidered hastily.

OF Porto Bano, of the republic of Colombia, where as consul Mr. Marshall was upholding the dignity of the United States, little could be said except that it possessed a sure harbor.

Each night the consuls, foreign residents, the wireless operator, the manager of the rusty railroad met for dinner. There at the head of the long table, by virtue of his years, of long service and distinguished manner, of his office, Mr. Marshall presided. For women and children, the consul's wife had a small dining room. There she had a death trap, and before "old man Marshall" came there had been no influence to remind the enforced bachelors of other days. But he had grown lax, irritable, morose. Their cheeks were unshaven. The coming of Mr. Marshall charged that. His standards of life, his tact, his worldly wisdom, his cheerful courtesy, his fastidious personal neatness shamed the younger men; the young men shamed the consul. He was a good opinion, brought back pride and self-esteem.

The little band of exiles were at second breakfast when the wireless man came in late to announce that a Red D. boat and the island of Caracua had both reported a hurricane coming north. Also, that much concern was felt for the safety of the yacht *Serapis*.

For forty-eight hours nothing had been heard from the *Serapis*. On the presence on board of Senator Hanley, the closest friend of the new President, the man who had been his friend since childhood, much concern was felt at Washington. To try to pick her up by wireless, the gunboat *Albatross* was ordered from the harbor. The consul was ordered to report.

As Marshall wrote out his answer, the consul exclaimed with interest: "He is of importance, then, this senator?" he asked. "Is it that in your country ships of war are at the service of a senator?"

grinned derisively. "At the service of this senator, they are," he answered. "They call him the 'king-maker,' the man behind the throne."

"But in your country," protested the Frenchman, "there is no throne. I thought your President was elected by the people?"

"The position of the boss is the most dangerous," said Marshall gravely. "because it is unofficial, because there are no laws to curb him. He is only that by the name. He is a menace to good government. They see in public office only a reward for past services."

"Two hours later the *Serapis*, showing she had met the hurricane and had come out of second best, steamed into the harbor.

Her owner was young Herbert Livingston, of Washington. He had been in the diplomatic service, and as minister to The Hague, wished to return to it.

"I'll tell you," said Marshall, "other distinguished persons, was the all-powerful Hanley. The kidnapping of Hanley, he had been a senator, and he had been a diplomat. As yet Livingston had no need. To a statesman of Hanley's astuteness, the largeness of Livingston's fund was self-explanatory.

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"That wireless operator," he continued hastily, "tell me there is a most amusing place, a few miles down the coast, Las Bocas, a sort of Coney Island where the government people go for the summer. There's your yacht."

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